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THE US COAST GUARD IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX WORLD:
A CONVERSATION WITH ADMIRAL LINDA FAGAN, 27TH COMMANDANT OF THE USCG

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OPENING REMARKS:

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SUZANNE MALONEY: Good afternoon to all those who are joining us here in the Falk Auditorium at the Brookings Institution. And to all of those who are joining us virtually from across the country and around the world. I'm Suzanne Maloney. I'm vice president and director of foreign policy here at the Brookings Institution. And on behalf of foreign policy and all of us at Brookings, I'm truly delighted to welcome all of you to this event on the United States Coast Guard and its mission encapsulated by its service motto *Semper Paratus* or Always Ready. In an era of unprecedented complexity and rapid change in the global maritime environment. This event is part of a growing body of Brookings work on the importance of maritime issues and naval power for U.S. national security and long term economic health, including our speaker series *The Seas and Strategy* as an operational component within the Department of Homeland Security and at all times a military service. The Coast Guard's military regulatory and law enforcement authorities make it a unique instrument of national power. Today, the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard stand watch safeguarding the nation's shores, the maritime transportation system on our inland rivers and Great Lakes. And ensuring national security from the high latitudes of the Indo-Pacific to the Arabian Gulf. Before we begin today's fascinating conversation, please allow me to offer brief introductions of our speaker and our moderator. Admiral Linda Fagan. Assume the duties of the 27th commandant of the United States Coast Guard in June 2022. She oversees 42,000 active duty, 7000 reserves and 8700 civilian personnel, as well as 21,000 auxiliary volunteers operating around the world. She is the first female Coast Guard commandant and the first female service chief of a U.S. military service. Admiral Fagan previously served as the 32nd vice commandant of the Coast Guard, Commander, Pacific Area and Maritime Defense Zone West. Commander of the First Coast Guard District and Deputy Director of Operations for Headquarters, U.S. Northern Command. Admiral Fagan has served on all seven continents and holds the distinction of being the Coast Guard ancient Trident, which is the service's longest serving Marine safety officer. The moderator for today's discussion is my wonderful colleague Melanie Sisson, who is a fellow in Brookings. Strobe Talbott Center for Security Strategy and Technology. Melanie specializes in research on the use of armed forces in international politics, U.S. national security and military applications of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning. Melanie has served in both academia and in the private sector. And in 2020, she published a book, along with Barry Blackman and James Stevens, entitled *Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy The Use of Force Short of War*. Finally, before we begin, I'd like to note that we're currently live streaming and on the record. Please feel free to send us your questions to events@brookings.edu or using the hashtag U.S. Coast Guard on Twitter or other social media. For those of you who are joining us here today in the Fall Auditorium, there will be a question and answer period following the initial discussion with Admiral Fagan. Thanks very much. And I'll now hand it over to you, Melanie and Admiral Fagan.

MELANIE SISSON: Thank you. Well, thank you, Suzanne, very much, and welcome to those of you joining us here in Falk today and everybody online as well. And especially to Admiral, we're delighted to have you here at Brookings for the conversation. I can say that we've all been looking forward to it greatly. There's a lot of enthusiasm. So thank you. I thought that, you know, certainly in the course of today, we're going to talk about the Coast Guard that we have now and then also about the Coast Guard that will have in the future to get us started and grounded in the today. The Coast Guard is a unique organization and in part it's unique because of how it sits and is situated within the interagency. So I thought if you could just refresh us a bit on on what that is for the Coast Guard. Where is the Coast Guard situated in the interagency?

LINDA FAGAN: Okay. So the short answer to the question is we are one of the operating components within the Department of Homeland Security that does not adequately, though, characterize the organization that we we are today. We will celebrate our 233rd birthday. This this August. We trace our roots back to the revenue Cutter Service, which was founded in 1790 by Alexander Hamilton, that a few cutters might prove to be useful sentinels of the law. And so from our very, very roots and beginning you see the blending of law enforcement, military, Maritime regulatory agency. And there are 11 different organizations that come forward to form what is now the modern day Coast Guard in the aftermath of 911. And as the Department of Homeland Security was stood up, the Coast Guard was moved from the Department of Transportation, where we had been for some time into the Department of Homeland Security. I frequently get asked, so is that the right department for the Coast Guard? And it is a resounding yes. Our role as a military, a maritime constabulary force. Our work as a law enforcement agency are really ready made for some of the problems that we face as a nation. When you consider the portfolio that is, that is homeland homeland security. And so we are the only then military branch in the United States that does not reside within the Department of Defense of said Department of Homeland Security. And the return on investment that we are able to create for the American public by residing in DHS is is pretty, pretty remarkable.

MELANIE SISSON: And what was that transition like from transportation over to DHS? How much did it affect your experience in the service or what the service was doing? And and how was that really felt at the time?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah, So we were we came over sort of intact, if you will, with the organization that we were with. And Dottie moved over and was then becomes resident within the Department of Homeland Security. Some of the other operating components in the department did not have that experience. And what we now see is Customs and Border Patrol and ICE and HCl, they were there were organizational shifts. And in some of the the legacy organizations that came into the department, the Coast Guard came our authorities intact, our operational chain of command, command and control intact. And then some people will ask, so was security added to the Coast Guard's mission at that point in time? Security has always been a part of the Coast Guard's mission and role. And so what happens in the aftermath of 911 is just it's a it's a it's a reprioritizing of security, certainly as it pertains to a critical infrastructure, the marine transportation system and all of the the the critical infrastructure in the Maritimes that enable our economic prosperity as a nation. We were already there doing the work, but 911 a re-emphasized some of the criticality of that maritime security work.

MELANIE SISSON: And you mentioned the other services and that you're distinct in in that you're not in the department with them, but certainly you interact with them, overlap with them, join up with them. Can you describe a little bit about how that happens? How how does Coast Guard intersect and work with and join up with you?

LINDA FAGAN: So we are absolutely an integrated member of the Joint force. The Tri Maritime strategy published by Marine Navy Coast Guard, acknowledges and reflects our contribution to the to the Joint force. The reality day to day is that at every level of the organization, starting with myself as the service chief, I, by practice, am a member of the Joint Staff. By law I am not. But every time the Joint Staff convenes in the Pentagon, the Coast Guard is there at the table alongside the other service chiefs, talking about the types of challenges that our collective militaries are face. Then at every level, you know, as you go down through the organization, the three star area commanders are district commanders at the sector level, the captain, the port. Each and every one of those levels,

the organization has connective tissue with our other military, you know, the other military forces primarily, it's a you know, it's Navy, Marines, but it can just as easily be working alongside the national your National Guard in a post, you know, hurricane emergency response or, you know, whoever may may be responding there. But we you know, I can talk in acronyms if I need to. I will. I'll try not to, but but but we are fully, fully integrated. Member of the Joint force.

MELANIE SISSON: You just mentioned in that conversation a number of the activities that the Coast Guard undertakes. And I have to confess, I looked at the list of missions and, you know, to get a sense of both the actual roles and responsibilities of the Coast Guard and the list is quite long. And so just to get a little bit of a higher level view broadly, what are the roles and responsibilities and authorities of the Coast Guard, especially the ones that are or again, unique to the service?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah, we we have this tendency to talk about our 11 statutory missions. And most people that point, they're sort of they look a little confused. Their eyes glaze over. The best way to characterize the breadth of authority of the organization and. I said it earlier. We're a maritime constabulary force. So if that means countering the flow of narcotics, approaching the country in the in the Eastern Pacific or Caribbean, enforcing people illegally fishing, conducting illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, conducting search and rescue operations, frankly, you know, if you are a mariner or a boater and you get in trouble at sea, we are the best in the world at finding you. If you are a large commercial vessel, we mark the waterway so that that ship can safely transit. We we license U.S. mariners, inspect U.S. ships, ensure that foreign ships arriving in the country are in compliance with all the environmental and safety and security regimes. We break ice. We operate the nations on the water, a fleet in the Arctic. We break out the resupply for McMurdo in Antarctica. And then, oh, by the way, we are a global Coast Guard. And so there is a lot of engagement with partners and allies. We come to you as you are and help other nations build their capacities to enforce their own sovereignty. And whether it's against illegal fishing or migration or narcotics or as simple as helping a nation's coast Guard learn how to repair their own small boat engines. And so we talk about being multi-mission. I think that is one of the really sort of unique things about the Coast Guard is that a Coast Guard ship with 75 to 120 people on it can be deployed to prevent the loss of life in the maritime migration realm and two days later could be redirected to counter an illegal fishing fleet or save a life of somebody who's fallen off of a cruise ship. It's the same crew, but they're trained and capable of moving throughout that that suite of missions.

MELANIE SISSON: Well, there's a lot in there, and I we will return to much of it as much as our time allows, given how much that is. We might not be able to get to to all of it before we we do that, though. It takes people to do all that work. And so when we look at the the Coast Guard today, who are the people on the Coast Guard today?

LINDA FAGAN: So the people in the Coast Guard are are the you know, the nations people we recruit broadly from around around the country. You do see sort of pockets reflected in some of this goes back to our legacy organization. So certainly the life saving service and lighthouse establishment that have strong foundations in New England and across the mid-Atlantic. And so you see larger you see large percentages of our workforce. From there. They've had parents serve. I have a daughter who's serving, right? So for many of us it can be a a family affair. But truly, our workforce is coming from across the spectrum of of citizens. They are drawn to the service for the mission, the the the role that we play in ensuring our homeland security and national security. What we offer to young people who join is is meaningful work. And that sense of belonging in an ability to

sort of contribute to something larger than self and that that sense of community and belonging is really then what holds people in the service. We are working on a, you know, a marketing campaign. There are many states where people don't really understand what the United States Coast Guard is. And frankly, you know, what the contribution is that we make to ensuring, again, our economic prosperity. So \$5.4 trillion in goods move through the inland waterways and into the ports. We are a maritime nation and the Coast Guard is integral in that work. And so our workforce gets excited about the types of things that we get to do. And so one right now it's just about helping people know who we are and then enlightening the value proposition that we are as an employer. We are hiring. Anybody is out there looking for work. I have business cards in the back.

MELANIE SISSON: Well, Coast Guard is 45% women, I believe, which is well, higher in proportion as compared to the other services. Why do you think that is?

LINDA FAGAN: So we the 45% number for women is cadets at the Coast Guard Academy. So a number of years ago, my experience in the early eighties as a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy, there were fewer than 10% women. And I. Did not look up into the organization and see women serving beyond the rank of lieutenant or junior lieutenant commander, because several women had come in through OCS. This starts in the mid mid seventies, but had not had the opportunity to come through the academy. So 45% women. We will graduate a class of brand new Anson's next Wednesday and they are about 45% women super excited about the opportunities and to get it out there across the rest of the workforce, we have gained ground on both women and minority males, but but have work to do to continue to ensure that we reflect the society that we serve. And, you know, I've been asked about well, you know, are these are these about different standards? Is there about quotas? And I always answer because I'm hiring talent, I want the best people possible. It is also proven that diverse work teams in all of the definition of that word diversity outperform non-diverse work teams. So it really is it's about readiness, it's about resiliency. It's about bringing the absolute best talent that we can into the workforce and then ensuring that we don't have barriers to entry or barriers to retention Once we once we bring bring people in.

MELANIE SISSON: Your commandant's intent makes clear that one of your main areas of focus is work is with the workforce. Why? Why did you think coming in that that was necessary to the extent that you wanted to focus that much of your time and attention on it?

LINDA FAGAN: So by the time I assumed command last June, we had about a 2000 person gap or shortfall in our junior enlisted ranks. That number has continued to grow. We are not onboarding the the full number of people that we need each week in the Cape May to grow primarily the enlisted force at the pace we need to to field the Coast Guard that the nation expects. The reason I have focused so clearly on it is now we can talk about largest acquisitions since World War Two. We've got all kinds of exciting things going on with new cutters and aircraft. But if you don't have the people, they're just interesting pieces of steel. The other imperative around this is that the the system, the, you know, human capital system that we've operated very similar to the other militaries. And, you know, we've got a number of military members in the audience. It really hasn't changed much since the end of World War Two. And, you know, back in the forties and fifties, you had a very different sort of workforce, primarily males. You know, women were home. Take care. That is not society or the workforce that we're drawing in now. And so unpacking assumptions around how often you have to move, how you enter the organization. Right now, the organization is optimized for an 18 year old right out of high

school with no experience to start at the bottom and then get grown up through the ranks. Last interaction I had in Cape May, which is our single session point for our enlisted force, and you ask folks, how many of you have bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees often, but not every class. PhDs, credentials as paramedics, certified cooks from the Culinary Institute of America. And so acknowledging the life and work experience and credentials that the workforce is bringing to us is a big part of what we've got going on as well. So that you don't have to start at the bottom if you, in fact have gained experiences useful to the organization.

MELANIE SISSON: And how is outreach to those different communities happening? What are you using media you talked about, you know, you have your business cards. Are you sending other people out with business cards and the like?

LINDA FAGAN: We've been one of the things we've had some, you know, great congressional support in allowing us to sort of buy back hire recruiters who we are adding to our recruiting capacity. We are opening recruiting offices. You need that capacity to actually sort of, you know, work through the administrative process of actually onboarding somebody into the organization, working with a marketing firm for, you know, how do we how do we go to the young people who might be interested? How do we find them? And it's no longer a, you know, big, big advertisement on the evening news. The young people I'm looking to hire are not watching the evening news. So, for example, Twitch. I didn't know what Twitch was a month ago. It's an online gaming site. So we're we're in the twitch way, you know, with advertising, looking to find people that might be interested. So again, going to where the workforce is and very different in targeted ways. And what we've done in the past for cooks you know the is a maritime service you going to see on your stomachs. You've got to have you've got to have cooks for your ships. So going into culinary schools, doing events that showcase what the opportunity is as a food services specialist on Cook in the Coast Guard, and we're having some great, great successes there. So it is there is no one smoking gun. This is all hands evolution with regard to helping helping the talent that is out there find us as an organization and then illuminating what the opportunity is that we provide that, you know, service is honorable. There's a broader conversation that we could probably be having as a nation about whether it's government service or military service writ large with regard to young people and their, you know, commitment to our democracy, which means, you know, some serving, however, that whatever that means means for you.

MELANIE SISSON: Well, so you're getting good mission driven people and then you're giving them interesting pieces of steel. Let's talk a little bit about the composition of the Coast Guard in terms of infrastructure and assets today. What does it look like?

LINDA FAGAN: So as I talked about, some of our legacy organizations of the revenue cutter service is the reason why we have large ocean going ships. The life saving service is the size, the foundations for the small boats that we operate. And this all pre-dates the age of flight. And so in time we've added both helicopters and fixed wing and unmanned systems, package them along with the large ships, the smaller boats, and, you know, allow us to operate across a breadth of maritime maritime risk, maritime challenges, the so the medium endurance cutters. So there are 210 and 270 feet long that we have now. So I'm going to date myself a little bit, a couple of people here in the audience, you know, like the two seventies were new when I graduated from the Coast Guard Academy. And so the offshore patrol cutter will be in the replacement. Well, Argus will go in the water a little bit later this summer and will begin to field a new fleet of medium endurance cutters to help with, you know, maritime migration, counter-narcotics flow, IUU fishing and really creating

a presence and sovereignty in our own laterals and maritime approaches. The waterway, Commerce, Qatar, we are on contract and moving forward with the waterway commerce cutter. These will be the cutters that support the the age to navigation safe navigation in our vast inland river system, the amount of cargo and commodities that flow in the nation's internal waterways or are as critical as our seagoing ports to the nation's economic prosperity. The cutters that they are replacing in some cases are pushing, you know, 70 years old. These are there long in the tooth and in need of replacement. And then lastly, I'll touch on a polar security cutter a lot of attention around the only heavy icebreaker that we have as a nation, the Coast Guard cutter Polar Star. So, again, I take myself a bit. I was a young ensign on the Polar Star in the mid-eighties, fresh out of the academy, and the ship was having a sort of midwife type engineering challenges. Then she just completed her 26th deep freeze and is in the in the yard to, you know, be worked internationally. And then we'll sail for Antarctica again in the fall. We are on budget for through long lead time material for a third polar security cutter. Bollinger, Mississippi, is the yard that that will construct that for us. They've recently purchased a halter. We're working to get to sufficient detailed design to begin cutting steel on the polar security cutter. It's it's coming. It is an exciting, exciting ship. It's a complicated ship. We've not build one as a nation since the seventies. And so, you know, making sure that we've got sufficiency in maturity and design before we start actually putting that ship together is where we are. We're really excited about it. Bollinger. Is excited and we're you know, we're moving moving forward. And it's a joint program office between the Coast Guard of the Navy. But the U.S. Coast Guard will operate this truly national level asset on behalf of the nation.

MELANIE SISSON: And what about the quality of the digital infrastructure that the Coast Guard has and works with today?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So we have been on a digital journey as an organization. My last tour headquarters is a two star, so this is six, seven years ago we were doing I'm going to call it the governance work, the work to put in place from an acquisition and a capability and a maintenance standpoint. The the processes that we needed to have in place to acknowledge that it's a capability and we need to acquire it and maintain it and field it as if it was a helicopter or a ship. That work has been done and we're seeing some good, good returns on investment with regard to IT systems IT refresh. There is still work to do this. Any of us that you frustrated with your phone or your computer is constant a movement for. But we've laid the governance work for that once. Shortly after I took over, we stood up an office of data and analytics. And so this is now the area that we're focusing on is the IT in the backbone. Investments are being made and we're moving forward in good way there. We have not valued our data. It sits in databases that don't talk to each other. It in many cases it's in narrative form. It's not easy to retrieve or analyze or seek patterns. And, you know, I machine learning that is all here and now. It is not cutting edge technology, but your data is not, you know, in a governance structure and in a warehouse structure, we're able to lay that over it. It is not providing value to you. And so we're we're we're leaned into that work as well. I would like us to get to a point where you can tell we do a lot of counter-narcotics work in the Eastern Pacific. We've been doing this work for, you know, 20 plus, 30 plus years. We've got data on where every one of those interdictions has taken place. Yet the ability to analyze 20 or 30 years worth of data and then begin to begin to predict where you might find the next encounter based on time of day location. We're not yet able to do that because we've got to do this through what I call the unfun governance work around around data right now.

MELANIE SISSON: Speaking of things that are also here and now, climate change, or at least the effects of climate change, do require some immediacy of response, not just in

terms of many of the missions that I know the Coast Guard has called upon to respond to. But but also in terms of your own assets and infrastructure onshore and at sea, I presume, how are you dealing with the those immediate seas in terms of the effects that climate change is having?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So we published a climate framework which has been within the last couple of months to provide some focused, intense clarity within the organization and with regard to the need to consider impacts of climate change, sea level rise and otherwise. With regard to our infrastructure, we are a maritime organization. Every one of our operations starts and ends at a piece of shoreside infrastructure, and the majority of that infrastructure is right at the sea's edge, leaving it vulnerable to the type of change that that we're already starting to see. And so, you know, building as we rebuild post hurricanes, ensuring that those infrastructure reinvestments are done in a way that's more resilient and acknowledging the potential for increased sea, sea level. And, you know, it really just it's it's as we invest in new infrastructure, also considering what the impacts for climate can be to to the infrastructure it is it's it's here and now. And as we continue to invest in that infrastructure, you know, ensuring we're doing it in a way that increases resiliency and readiness and not doesn't decrease it.

MELANIE SISSON: So it's very clear that the Coast Guard operates globally. Even in just the course of the discussion thus far, you've mentioned, I think almost every region in the world, if not in fact, every single one. What is the rough distribution of the Coast Guard globally? Are we more Coast Guard in some places and less than others? What does that look like?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah, So the the majority, the majority of your Coast Guard, the nation's Coast Guard is either based CONUS. Hawaii, Alaska, Guam. And then we we forward deploy from there. We have a small unit of people in Japan, but no ships or aircraft, small unit of people in Europe. Again, no ships or aircraft. But as I you know, as I travel around the world and you could pick a COCOM, you know, I won't run through all the geographic combatant commanders. They can't get enough of us. They want more of us. And so, you know, for example, we had a East Coast based cutter out of Port Portsmouth, Virginia, operating off the coast of Africa, supporting the AFRICOM commander and partnering with nations on, you know, one just in our operating countering illegal fishing. And so the template is, you know, from those bases, again, Guam, Honolulu, Alaska, a number of places in Alaska, CONUS, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands. And then we forward for deploy. You know, when I walked through the major ships assets that were operating did not mention the fast response cutters. And they are being fielded to replace small patrol boats there, 154 feet long. They're very, very capable. And so we have several of them based in Guam. One went to quadrillion eight, holds like 2100 sea miles. So is not a very big ship to do that. But so different ways to create presence and force project as we look at that global demand signal on the Coast guard.

MELANIE SISSON: There is, of course, a lot of interest in the Indo-Pacific right now and I believe the Coast Guard was referenced in the National Indo-Pacific strategy. The only federal agency has to be referenced in that document, and not once, but twice. What is your understanding of of how the White House is thinking about or the administration, the department, the entire interagency is thinking about the role of and the value of Coast Guard operations in that region.

LINDA FAGAN: So is goes back to sort of some of your opening remarks with regard to our our value proposition, particularly in competitive space, short of conflict, right, where

we have the opportunity to engage from a partner, an ally. You know, capacity, sovereignty. And so the you know, the the national security apparatus in the country is looking at the Coast Guard. How do we create a more persistent presence throughout the Indo-Pacific? And how might the Coast Guard be an instrument that allows that when when a Coast Guard ship pulls into Papua New Guinea, it brings a very different set of authorities and expertise than if a large Navy combatant were more in the region. And so how do we increase that that capacity? We are on budget for we'll have one of our 270 foot cutters later this year will have its homeport changed to Honolulu. It's a we're calling it a Pacific support tender, but a ship for deployed in Hawaii who who can create more opportunity and, you know, persistence as we engage throughout the Indo-Pacific and in Oceania. And, you know, I also and I'm talking about this in the ship context, but it is important to remember we also of fueled mobile training teams, so small teams, 2 to 4 people who bring law enforcement expertise and experience, whatever the nation may need. And we are particularly good about coming to you as you are with regard to what is a nation looking for. We've also done quite a bit in the region and continue to look to expand the conversation, not just in the Indo-Pacific, but truly, you know, throughout the world. And this is of regard to, you know, bilaterals around ship riders, fisheries enforcement. Hence counter-narcotics. So, for example, we've got a bilateral agreement with Fiji with regard to fisheries enforcement. And so if you have a Coast Guard ship in the region, you bring a Fijian on board who has all of the authority. RESIDENT In enforcing Fijian ship rules, we provide the platform, they bring the expertise and so we've got a number of those bilateral agreements, not just in the Indo-Pacific but around the world. And with a group of African partners. Just a couple of months ago when I was done, the first question I got was, So you raise this hand, he says, How do I get one of those bilaterals and who do I need to talk to?

MELANIE SISSON: Well, so the US government is hungry for the Coast Guard. Partners and allies are hungry for the Coast Guard. Is there enough Coast Guard to go around? Is the service, you know, adequately funded and sufficiently sized?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So, you know, it's funny, we've the demand on the service has always felt greater than the size of the service. And so it does require some, you know, trade offs as you look at, you know, risk and in risk portfolio. We you know, we're about a \$12.5 billion a year organization now. The support that we're receiving congressionally, a bipartisan support has never been better. The the understanding of the Coast Guard's contribution as a unique instrument of national power has never been been better understood across all elements of the of the interagency. I spoke at the State of Coast Guard and I said this morning at the congressional breakfast with the investment decisions that have been made, particularly with regard to major acquisitions, we are on our way to a \$20 billion a year Coast Guard now by 2033 and a steady, reliable 3 to 5% budget growth is necessary to continue to bring workforce and people and other investments infrastructure forward so that we've got the right sort of support elements in place to ensure that as that demand signal in the Indo-Pacific or in the Africa for ships is that demand signals created that we're able to, you know, bring ships back to maintain adequately train people and make sure that then we're able to to create that more enduring presence that the nation is looking for.

MELANIE SISSON: So thanks for the really good look at the Coast Guard today. Let's also talk about where the Coast Guard is going and what you see for it in the tomorrow, because your commandant's intent also is very clear about that future focus. I think the the motto that you've attached is tomorrow looks different and so will we. What do you see in the national and international environments that have convinced you that an always ready.

Coast Guard tomorrow needs to be equipped differently and to operate differently than it does today.

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So the you know, the the the threats and the challenges globally continue to increase and continue at an increasing pace. And so, you know, we know what the challenges look like in the Indo-Pacific right now. You know, we look at the Russian invasion of Ukraine, you see challenges in increased usage, human usage in the Arctic and all of that in this sort of maritime governance, maritime sovereignty realm. And so as I think about where do we need to be as a Coast Guard, you know, in ten or 15 years time, you know, it requires us to be nimble and agile. And so as we take, for example, Scan Eagle, which is the unmanned system that we're fielding on all of the national security cutters. And what is the next technology? What is that next key enabler that we will need to deploy with that ship? The national security cutters will be with us, you know, 50, 50 plus years in 20 years time. What is that next technology? I don't know. But we need to have enough flexibility to incorporate what that next thing is. And it also means and this does come back to workforce, that you've got a workforce that is trained and capable of, of continuing to learn and making making those shifts. So, for example, we've just we've just put up a cyber rating and we have not established a new rating as an organization on the enlisted side for it's it's been quite some time. But that is also an acknowledgment of this changing risk and world that. We will we will need to be be operating in. And then I you know, the question I ask myself frequently as we talk about readiness and resiliency and all of the things that go into creating that, the question then becomes ready for what, in ten years time, and making sure that we've got the right foundation, the right capabilities, and then the right intellectual capital to allow us to make those pivots as we as we need to.

MELANIE SISSON: Can you give a couple of examples as you think about the the service that you've just described and why some specific examples of what you're changing in terms of workforce management that you think are moving the path in that direction?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So some of the the the workforce work is been been pretty exciting. So, you know, we are a we're a big bureaucracy with 233 years old. So you got to, you know, make sure that you don't, you know, take take too big a step and leave leave everyone behind. But so, for example, we've talked that we're talking about lateral entry. You're an aircraft mechanic. You're fully certified in the civilian community and you have a calling to serve and you'd like to come serve with us that we would bring you in on a contract as an E five or six for four years. Maybe you stay. Maybe you go back on the cyber side. I would like to see us get to I'm going to call it, frankly, a revolving door. If you can come to us on the active duty side. You know, you got to shave your point. We no ponytails yet. You got to take the ponytail off, but work for us for a couple of years and then go back to your civilian employer. Grow the product. But but continue to cross-pollinate, particularly in some of those really highly technical fields. The government gives you access to exquisite national technical means. The industry's got the speed of innovation and and, you know, money and ability to continue to innovate brought together. They can be a powerful tool. And so you know across the force creating those opportunities. The other thing we've talked about we're not we're not there yet but right now you're either on active duty or your civilian or your reservist. Might there be room for some other category of I'm going to use the term part time, but that you've got, you know, some level of benefit, but you're working three days a week instead of, you know, the 24 seven 365 contract that comes now. So the mantra that I have given to the workforce team is eliminate barriers. And as you, you know, just think back to you know, I didn't share at the open. I started the Coast Guard Academy in 1981. 1980 is the first year that women graduate the Academy. In 1976, gender was a barrier to attending the service academies.

Right. We're now at a point societally, gender is, you know, is not a barrier to service. But. But what else is there that we have not question From an assumption standpoint as we work to build and field the workforce of the future?

MELANIE SISSON: Well, at Brookings, we're big fans of big, creative and sometimes unexpected ideas, and it sounds like you have a couple of those in there. We are getting close to a time where I'm starting to seem greedy for hogging all the questions for myself, so I'm going to bring in one or two questions from the online audience and then welcome some from the from the group assembled here today. First, there were some inquiries about I us and about observations you might have about changes in its frequency or location or any of the techniques being used over time. It's showing up more in newspapers and media reports. Yeah. Do you think that's because we're more sensitive to it or because there have been those kinds of changes over time?

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So IUUF, illegal, unregulated, unreported fishing? We've published my predecessor published an IUU fishing strategy. This is a global problem. There is not a region of the world immune from IUU fishing, including ourselves in the Gulf of Mexico and, you know, incursions with Mexican fishermen fishing for red red snapper. It was interesting when the strategy was published, it was done alongside the SOUTHCOM commander. I have heard my DOD counterparts utter the words IOOF more in the last year. I didn't think they even knew what it was just a couple of years ago. But all of a sudden, you know, fish or fish are in it. The the reason they're why it is so critical and as you look at some of the largest offenders, China being. And you've seen a lot of coverage with regard to the Chinese fishing fleet activity. It at its most elemental, is its theft, its theft of a nation's natural resources. And left unchecked, it erodes the rules based order and the governance structures that all sovereign nations rely on. And so I think there's been a broader understanding that it isn't it isn't really I mean, it is about the fish, but it is more about the the illegal pattern of behavior that's done in contradiction to the Ackroyd agreed rules based order. Having said that, it is a challenging problem set. This truly will take a village. It will take multilateral bilateral regional will to counter some of the some of the problem. I spoke about the bilateral agreements that we've got in place. There are regional fisheries management organizations there. They're some of the strongest and the most aligned around the Pacific. There are other regions of the world that would benefit from some of those similar regional regional engagements. And so I think it's just sort of been a little bit of a perfect storm of just understanding and in acknowledging the impacts of the that particular illegal activity.

MELANIE SISSON: One last one for me before we start passing around some microphones, and this was not exactly for me. It's from the online audience. Please describe the threat, our maritime critical infrastructure and the Coast Guard's capacity and actions to defend and deter those trying to so.

LINDA FAGAN: So as I mentioned, we have a we have a maritime security role in particular focused at the marine transportation system and all of the critical infrastructure there. And so, you know, from a ship standpoint, we ensure the safe, secure environmental movement of ships, both US flagships and foreign flagships in an in and out of the country and on the on the facility side, ensuring that they've got appropriate, you know, port security infrastructure in place. We do have a role who probably more more interesting to the audience is, is our role in the cyber cyber realm that I mentioned, standing up the cyber rating specialist. We we are going to field our third cyber protection team this summer. It will be based on the West Coast. We've been hiring a marine transportation specialist who also have cyber background and understanding and they are

going into our district offices around the coast to bridge the conversation between the ports and the port facilities and the kind of commercial providers and where that cyber risk resides. We've been we've got a couple of things in the work, works with the department and with the administration to help clarify our role in a response post cyber incident. And then, you know, working to align with regard to, you know, pre pre cyber kinds of kinds of requirements and is very much active work work ongoing. And I the maritime sector is you know, the risk is not zero but but there's broad understanding within the sector of why it's so critical that we we get after get after this work.

MELANIE SISSON: Okay. Well I would like to invite questions now from the audience here in the auditorium, please. When you ask a question, introduce yourself and where you are from. And also confine yourself to asking an actual question and doing it briefly and concisely. I will watch the clock. You have 45 seconds, which is actually quite generous. And after that I will rudely interrupt and handed over so that we can hear the admiral's response. Okay, So hands up, please, for some questions. We've got a gentleman here in a jacket with sunglasses in the pocket. Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thanks. Isaac Carden from the Carnegie Endowment. And thank you, Admiral, for taking the time to help us understand the U.S. Coast Guard's mission in the Indo-Pacific. And I come at this having spent a lot of time trying to understand the China Coast Guard and China's maritime interests in general in that region, I'm curious if you could expand a little bit more on what you think of as the Coast Guard's potential role in and around areas? And I'm particularly interested in the resource claims of lateral states there and their difficulties in preventing, among other things, a fishing, but also in contending with China Coast Guard, preventing them from doing their own fishing and other resource exploitation. Thanks.

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So we've we've deployed a number of the national security cutters, you know, over into the region. It is done under the operational control and tactical control of PAC fleet and Indo-Pacific so that the Coast Guard is not over there sort of doing our own thing, separate from what the broader U.S. military operations are in the region or our role really is and just as you've identified, helping nations create their own capacity to enforce their own sovereignty, in some cases, his presence with a Coast Guard ship and one of their ship riders in other, it's a mobile training team who's helping to teach fisheries enforcement or or helping to place aides to navigation so that their own ships can come and go. It really runs the the suite of things that are kind of in the realm of maritime governance with a focus on creating and expanding a nation's capacity to enforce some of their own own rules and sovereignty. We as we operate as a Coast Guard, we operate as a Coast Guard. We do not, you know, the the combatants, the you know, the Navy's got a role and a mission there. And that's what the Navy ships need to be used for. And the Coast Guard role is much more in this creating capacity as we look at the conflicts throughout the throughout the region.

MELANIE SISSON: Another question right here in the front row, please. With pineapples on the tie.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think you're having a more pointed follow up, shall I say, to that last question? I read recently a proposal from, to be clear, not from the current national security community of this government, nor from my think tank CSI US, that suggested the establishment of a permanent installation in the South China Sea, a joint installation of the US Coast Guard and the Philippine Coast Guard, where we would have ships of our country. Our Coast Guard and their Coast Guard actually have a an installation on one of

the atolls in the South China Sea. It intrigued me as to the value of doing something like that. Notwithstanding, it wouldn't be the United States Navy.

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So there's obviously there are a lot there's a lot of thinking and approaches out there with regard to the interest is in more persistent presence. My view sort of caution is that this comes back to the people. We need to make sure that the ships, wherever we homeport them, are in position to be maintained and that the families want to be there as well. And so is, I think, about opportunity in the region. This becomes about, you know, forward locations for logistics and resupply as as a conversation opposed to where you where you build a base for, you know, Coast Guard cutter and pick pick another nation that may come. But really, the the approach right now is we think about the region is how, you know, Hawaii, Guam become very attractive areas because you're not all the way into the region, but you're closer than when you're on the West Coast in the United States. And we we have a relatively easy time getting families there. And then these are technically sophisticated ships, the new ships. And you got to be got to maintain them and drydock them and and support them and then forward, forward, deploy them.

MELANIE SISSON: We have time for one last question. Let's see. I will take the gentleman in the jacket with this time, not sunglasses, just the regular kind of tucked in there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Brookings Bruce Jones from Brookings, thank you so much for being here. To your last question, other services are encountering significant difficulties in terms of pace of shipbuilding, pace of maintenance. To what extent has that been a challenge or as do you anticipate it being a challenge in your in the future? Coast Guard.

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah. So, you know, I shared with you where we were with with polar security cutter and just it reflects just complexity and challenge in shipbuilding. The now the defense industrial base as it pertains to both shipbuilding and ship maintenance. And I think it's you know, we're sitting here you would say something very similar is probably not as resilient as we will need it to be as a nation. I compete for that same shipbuilding capacity and repair capacity as the Navy does, and so we do as the two primary seagoing services spend quite a bit of time. Our senior acquisition officials spend a lot of time sort of talking about exactly this, the defense in. Industrial base. And they too, if we you know, if a one of the major builders were up here, they would tell your workforce as well. This is a you know, really it's a it's a challenge for the for the nation for all of the employers is ensuring we've got got workforce. And so you know as we continue to to build and I'm comfortable where we are with the the acquisitions and the contract moving forward but we will need to maintain all of those ships. And as you look at drydock in repair capacity around the country, it will it will continue to be a challenge for not just us, but the Navy as well.

MELANIE SISSON: Well, that was done with such efficiency. We actually have time for one more class. So let's do with the back row.

LINDA FAGAN: There he is.

MELANIE SISSON: There you are.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is Roger Crocetti. I'm an author and an editorial contributor on technology policy to The Hill newspaper. You've touched on this briefly, but I wonder if you could comment a little bit more on the prospect for automation Robots, Staff,

Robot Crew. Artificial Intelligence. The gains have been made in artificial intelligence suggests that there may be a point in the future where you could drastically reduce your staffing requirements by substituting robots or robotic vessels for them. So I wonder if you could talk about that whole field and its impact on one of the main points you've made in that is staffing requirements people.

LINDA FAGAN: Yeah, all any and all of that is, you know, needs to be part of the conversation as we as we look into the end of the future. Having said that, as a search and rescue organization, as a law enforcement agency, we will always need human beings, you know, reaching over the gun, all of this small boat to save somebody. The swimmer that comes out of the helicopter, the over the horizon pursuit boat that actually does the interdiction of the go fast. We will always need people at the pointy end. But there are a lot of enablers and there's a lot of technology out there that makes your efficacy and ability to put that person that piece of steel on target that much more effective. And so, as I said, you know, we've got some unmanned systems that were operated. We've recently sailed drone. Many of you are familiar with sail drone as a way to increase maritime domain awareness in some of the approaches. And so all of that needs to be be considered as we think about how do we ensure that again, our most precious resource, the human being, when you put them on a ship or an aircraft or a boat, that they go out on target with reliable sort of success and and come back as a way of ensuring you're getting the best return on investment and efficiency out of the out of the capabilities that you're that you're operating. Thank you.

MELANIE SISSON: Well, on behalf of Brookings foreign policy, let me thank the audience for joining us here today. For those of you asked questions, thank you for the really excellent questions. I need to ask you the service of just staying in your seats for a few moments so the admiral can depart easily and smoothly. Admiral, thank you so much for talking to us today. Thank you for your stewardship of our Coast Guard, our coast, and describing to us your vision for what our Coast Guard will look like in the future. And if you can join me in thinking that.

LINDA FAGAN: Thank you. Thanks, everybody, for.